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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000209

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: LEFTIST OPPOSITION PARTIES UNITED, BUT BARELY

Ref: A. Minsk 177

Q B. 06 Minsk 978

Q C. Minsk 187

Summary

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11. (C) Three opposition political parties have formed a Union of Leftist Parties as a means of combining their resources and advancing their social-democratic economic agenda at the next democratic congress. Recently, however, high-level members of Aleksandr Kozulin's Social Democratic Party and the Women's Party have communicated to Emboffs their deep distrust of fellow union partner and opposition communist leader Sergey Kalyakin's motives and rumored sources of support. Nevertheless, all three parties remain committed to convening a democratic congress of opposition parties with or without de facto opposition leader Aleksandr Milinkevich's participation. End summary.

Despite GOB Roadblocks, BPC Leads Charge toward Union

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12. (U) On December 17, 2006, during a convention in the Ukrainian city of Chernihiv, the opposition Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC) formed a Union of Leftist Party (ULP) with the opposition Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Gramada" (BSDP) and the "Nadzeya" women's party. Having brought more than half of the convention's delegates, BPC Chair Sergey Kalyakin announced that he envisaged the leftist union as the core movement within the pro-democracy opposition coalition that would champion a socio-economic agenda at the coalition's next congress (ref A). According to Kalyakin, uniting Belarus' opposition socialist parties would enable them to highlight their ideological differences with the Lukashenko regime. Seeming to anticipate the GOB's efforts to block the union's creation, Kalyakin denounced the GOB's registration process as political and vowed to find a legal "organizational form" that would achieve ULP goals. [Note: Unsurprisingly, Belarus' Ministry of Justice on February 16 formally denied the ULP legal registration ostensibly because its founding convention delegates had been appointed and not elected. End note.]

BSDP Needs BPC Support, But Has Second Thoughts

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13. (C) Despite public statements of shared objectives with the other two ULP members, BSDP leaders have privately shared with us their true interests in a union with Kalyakin's party. BSDP Deputy Chair and Kozulin attorney Igor Rynkevich recently noted that his party views its alliance with BPC as a means to push the democratic

opposition coalition to convene a democratic congress sooner rather than later. He also noted that such an alliance would foster cooperation with labor unions and smaller leftist parties, such as Nadzeya ("Hope"), that would likely send delegates to the Congress. BSDP Deputy Chair Vladimir Nistyuk also revealed to Poloff that his party was practically bankrupt and that the BSDP leadership had agreed to join the leftist union to gain Kalyakin's financial assistance. Nistyuk noted that Kalyakin claims (and demonstrates) that he has received "enormous amounts of money" from outside sources. [Note: We have heard this claim from many activists within and outside of the coalition; Kalyakin has spoken to us directly about his access to sources of support. End note.]

14. (C) However, Nistyuk and other BSDP national leaders have heard from their rank and file that Kalyakin is using his resources mainly to recruit BSDP members into BPC. BSDP Youth Wing leader Dmitriy Kruk described the ULP as Kalyakin's possible effort at a hostile takeover of BSDP. Rynkevich told Poloff that Kozulin shared Nistyuk's and Kruk's misgivings about the leftist union. However, Rynkevich downplayed the ULP's day-to-day cooperation and described the union as merely a formalization of BPC-BSDP 2006 regional cooperation agreements during the recent local election campaign (ref B).

Nadzeya Seeks Union with BSDP, But Wary of BPC  
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15. (C) On March 1, Nadzeya Chair Yelena Yeskova confirmed that Kalyakin and other senior BPC members had begun lobbying her to join the leftist union even before she had been formally elected to her position in September 2006. Expressing strong reservations about Kalyakin's motives and

MINSK 00000209 002 OF 002

his sources of support, Yeskova confessed to Poloff that her party consented to join the leftist union only because of the opportunity to join with BSDP. She articulated that the vast majority of her party members much more closely identify with BSDP's more centrist social democratic agenda than with BPC's more radical ideology. She added that Kozulin and his wife, Irina Kozulina, were extremely popular among Nadzeya members, who regard the leftist union as a way to support Kozulin and his agenda at the opposition congress.

All Roads Lead to Congress (with or without Milinkevich)  
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16. (C) While advocating the addition of women's issues to that agenda, Yeskova generally shared Kozulin's view that the congress' principal goal should be a common opposition declaration on the illegitimacy of Lukashenko's presidency and the drafting of a short common opposition plan, or "Little Constitution," for the transformation of Belarus from a totalitarian state to a liberal democracy (ref C). Moreover, she agreed with her ULP counterparts that the congress should convene with or without de facto opposition leader Aleksandr Milinkevich.

17. (C) However, unlike Kozulin and Kalyakin, Yeskova would not endorse opposition Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) Chair Vintsuk Vyachorka's compromise plan to encourage Milinkevich to participate in the Congress by naming him as Head of the coalition's Political Committee and rotating the coalition's executive body leadership among the party leaders. Yeskova predicted that the BPF scheme would worsen the coalition's already deep divisions by simultaneously bolstering Milinkevich's and Kalyakin's leadership claims.

Comment  
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18. (C) On its face, the leftist union is an effort by the parties to speak with one voice as they advance an ideology along the lines of EU socialist parties. Kalyakin is clearly interested in trying to use the leftist forces as a prop for greater prominence in the democratic coalition. Regarding the opposition left forces, once the congress has concluded, the leftist bloc may prove itself to be a union of convenience.

Stewart